3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

code of the society could be imposed upon leaders by society members. The zo were the principal characters in the society, and were charged with protecting the traditions and institutions of the group. The zo people had a "majestic status." They were respected by chiefs and elders, and "honored with intense devotion by the youth of the land." In personal characteristics a zo was "chivalrous, courteous, public spirited, law-abiding and fearless." The zo was also a teacher of "native lore, arts, and crafts." He or she had full knowledge of the history and traditions of the people. Above all, the zo were "authentic" judges of all matters pertaining to the people's welfare.[26]

As role models these African leaders correspond to some extent with Gullah elders. But there is an even closer relation between zo and Gullah spiritual parents to whom the slaves looked for guidance and who maintained such "absolute authority" over them. Laura Towne wrote:

> I went to-day to see Maum Katie, an old African woman who remembers worshipping her own gods in Africa but who has been nearly a century in this country. She is bright and talkative, a great "spiritual mother," a fortune teller, or rather prophetess, and a woman of tremendous influence over her spiritual children.

Similarly, Harriet Ware was acquainted with "Old Peggy, the 'leader' from Fripp Point." Ware was told that "Old Peggy and Binah" were the two "whom all that came into the Church, had come through, and the Church supports (takes care of) them." Thus the Methodist missionary correctly assessed the role and power of women diviners in Gullah church membership. A further example of female influence in the sacred-secular world of slaves is provided by Francis Kemble. An old woman on the Butler plantations named Sinda, reigned as a prophetess among the slaves for many years and acquired as ascendency over them. When she declared the world would soon end, "her assertion took such possession of the people on the estate that they refused to work, and the rice and cotton fields were threatened with an indefinite fallow in consequence of this strike on the part of the cultivators." The overseer, realizing the impossibility of attempting force, waited until the appointed day arrived. Sinda' prediction proved false and no emancipation was forthcoming. The people went back to work and Sinda, in a fallen state, was "tremendously flogged."[27]

It is difficult to discern where one type of socioreligious leadership